

ELINOR WONDERS WHY

NOTES TO WRITERS

NOTE: Awesome new title “**ELINOR WONDERS WHY**”

NOTE: Hazel is now Olive.

IN GENERAL:

Our stories are driven by CURIOSITY.

We want to inspire a sense of WONDER about the world.

We want to encourage kids to go out and LOOK AROUND for themselves.

We want to model scientific practices: HOW to observe, ask questions, answer questions, solve problems.

The science needs to come before the stories, not the other way around.

Humour, humour, humour – OH! And repetition!

Make sure the lesson is something a five-year-old will actually remember: a fun take-away that they can apply to their daily lives.

Emotional stakes are very important but remember that in our show our kids can also be driven by curiosity or problem solving.

Start with Elinor’s question first, make sure it is a kid-relatable question, then make sure it is answerable in a kid-like way.

Elinor and her friends discover the answers to their problems by observation and testing their thinking.

Look at things like a preschooler – think of questions they would ask (there are LOTS!)

Elinor must always OBSERVE the natural world, either to figure out her natural world problem (i.e. Why do birds sing?) or to be inspired as to how to fix her Designed World problem (how to make my clubhouse bigger, how to make the ketchup run faster).

KEEP IT SIMPLE: Leave lots of room for exploring, observing and experimenting

Some things that are not simple:

- too many story beats: the kids do this, and then they do that, and then they meet this character, and then they go here, and then they meet that other character, etc.
- too many time jumps, or having the kids think about things that haven't happened, or having them talk about an object we haven't seen

Avoid plots that depends solely on something a character says once. Assume that kids will only listen to about 50% of the dialogue, but you don't know which 50% they will listen to.

Think about this: if someone watched the entire episode with the sound turned off, would they still be able to get the gist of what happened and why it mattered to the character.

Think about how a little kid would tell the story to another kid. Would they get lost in the middle of remembering the story, or would they be able to tell it in three or four sentences?

Avoid school projects, Town Events, big shows or performances if possible.

REMEMBER – these kids are in KINDERGARTEN – there is no homework, no presentations (except maybe show and tell) no class projects (except things that are done in class) and the focus is on PLAYING!

Keep the kids OUTSIDE and INDEPENDENT as much as possible, while being thoughtful about modeling safe activities for children. If there are things the kids need or want to do that are potentially dangerous (such as swimming, etc.), an adult should be present.

Let them figure things out for themselves – if what they're trying to figure out needs too much explanation from an adult, you may need a simpler question.

Leave lots of room for Elinor to observe, theorize and (usually) apply her knowledge, design and build.

= BELIEVE (cue metal guitar sounds) that there is a story out there that gets all the elements you want (science, emotional stakes, etc.) across in one elegant fell swoop.

HAVE FUN! The story plot should bring a smile to your face because of how cute, clever and harmonious it feels.

CURRICULUM:

In addition to the Life Science (LS) and Natural Design (ND) Learning Goals in our original Curriculum Document, we have included NEW learning goals centered around Earth Science (ES) and Engineering and Technology (ET).

These are described in more detail in the updated curriculum document (link below). Give it a read! It's chock FULL of helpful and inspiring info.

The Earth Science (ES) goals support the discovery of different materials that make up the earth (snowflakes, sand is broken down rock, leaves composting, water found in different places). Also plants and animals change their environment as they build houses, find food, and grow bigger. Changes have effects on other plants and animals. The 3rd goal talks about how people use resources to live better and how we can be respectful of the earth as we do so.

The Engineering and Technology (ET) Goals focus on teaching that engineering is a process that includes asking questions, making observations, and gathering information to help us decide how to solve a problem. They also focus on the idea that we use technology that has been engineered and without it we would live very differently. The focus here is on low tech technology (hand lens, pencil, paper, rakes) rather than high tech (computers, TVs).

- **Every Episode of “Elinor Wonders Why” will have ONE of either a Life Science (LS) or Earth Science (ES) Goal.**
- **Many Episodes also include Natural Designs (ND) and/or Engineering Technology (ET) as appropriate.**
- **All Episodes include as many SEP Goals as appropriate.**

TESTING –

A few things we’ve observed from pilot and storybook testing:

- Have fun with the humor, and look for ways to incorporate gentle surprises. In the pilot episode, the sound design of Elinor interrupting class by playing with the Velcro went a long way in engaging the audience and building momentum that carried through the story.
- Make use of Elinor, Ari, and Olive’s physicality. In the pilot, the moments where Elinor hopped, Ari fluttered off the ground, and Olive used her trunk to write were very memorable to kids.
- Don’t assume prior knowledge from the audience. From a curriculum point of view, this means taking the time to set up foundational concepts before jumping into the main learning goal. From a story and character perspective, this means treating the show as episodic and not serialized.
- Connections between concepts should be overt, rather than subtle. Important story and curriculum points not be left to interpretation – make sure to connect the dots clearly, wherever possible.

CONVENTIONS

ELINOR CAN SPEAK “FOR” THE ANIMALS she’s observing, in their voices, as kids do.

THOUGHT BUBBLES: These are used mostly for “theorizing and planning” trying out solutions and discarding them. Occasionally we can use them to review a plot point that happened

before the Episode began i.e. in “Special Places” when we see Ari’s Dad tell Ari to rake the leaves.

OLIVE’S NATURE BOOK - Olive can reference her nature book (kept in her satchel). This takes the viewer into an illustrative learning moment to share factual information needed to help the kids on their exploration.

OLIVE’S NOTEBOOK – Olive often makes notes as they are gathering data, with simple drawings (no words) and she can put their findings in a simple chart.

SCIENCE MOMENT ECU: to show the details and workings of whatever they are closely observing (we don’t necessarily need a magnifying glass for this, although Elinor often uses one).

SONGS – The songs either are used in the “observation” section or in the “putting the plan in motion” section. Songs should not introduce a curriculum concept, but rather reinforce it.

CATCHPHRASES – Elinor - “That’s soo interesting.” “We need MORE observations!” “I wonder...”

We don’t have catchphrases for Ari or Olive yet - nothing that’s been reused over several episodes, maybe we should dig into this?

Ari – Maybe “Let’s go.” “Let’s try.” “Let’s find out.” Ari is the “jump in” character

Olive – Maybe Olive is the one who sees details in, and patterns across, the data she collects, so maybe “I see a pattern here.” Or “Let’s look more closely.”

Nuts and Bolts

Remember, awesome new show title: “ELINOR WONDERS WHY!”

HAZEL is now OLIVE, Joe Mouse is now Jack Mouse, Kia Wombat is now Koa Wombat, Suzie Aardvark is now Sheila Aardvark (although we haven’t used her yet).

PITCHES – should be ONE PARAGRAPH, and should include Elinor’s Question (and the answer, to make sure it’s simple).

Outline – 4-5 pages, if it’s more your story may be too complex.

Script length - aim for 12-14 pages and around 120 lines of dialogue.

Check for Elinor’s catchphrases, they need to be in every script.

Every script needs a song, written at Outline. Song Guide link below.

Check your Title Page; make sure Elinor’s Question, the Logline, the Learning Goals and the Settings, Characters and Props are all listed.

Don't forget to check the Script Assumptions and flag anything that might be a problem.

Please read through the PBS KIDS Editorial Guidelines (attached).

MOVING FORWARD

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF:

Stories like the Velcro story – observe/unpack something that kids deal with in their everyday lives.

Olive Stories

Designed Solution from Observations

Dad Stories

Night Stories

Winter Stories

INFO FROM THE TRACKER:

Learning Goals (15 Scripts)

Life Science (LS):

LS2 – 7

LS3 – 3

LS 4 – 2

LS5 – 1

LS8 - 2

Natural Design (ND)

ND1 – 1

ND2 – 3

ND4 - 1

ND3 – 6

ND4 – NO ND GOAL - 4

Story Lead:

Ensemble (Elinor): 11

Featured Friend Ari: 3

Featured Friend Olive: 1

Settings Main (Main Location):

School: 5

Elinor's Home: 3

Hazel Home: 1

Ari Home: 1

Trail/Forest: 3

Snow: 1

Night: 1

Secondary Characters

Ranger Rabbit: 5

Ms. Mole: 5

Goat Twins: 4

Mrs. Gorilla 3

Sally Beaver: 2

Tito: 2

Camilla: 2

Koa Wombat: 2

Mr. Dog: 2